



United States Department of Agriculture

IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

October/November 2015

A large red combine harvester is shown in a field, with its long red auger extended and pouring a thick stream of golden-brown grain into the bed of a red dump truck. The background shows a cloudy sky and the tops of other crops in the field.

**KURT SIMON NAMED
STATE CONSERVATIONIST**

**COVER CROP ECONOMICS
TOOL NOW AVAILABLE**

NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION SERVICE
www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov

District Conservationist Jason Moore (left) and Wetland Restoration Specialist John Paulin visit a restored wetland in Hancock County on Sept. 29.



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a **Message** from the **State Conservationist**

Vilsack Names Kurt Simon State Conservationist

US Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the appointment of Kurt Simon as the new Iowa State Conservationist for NRCS Oct. 15, 2015, at the Des Moines Botanical Garden during an event focusing on USDA conservation work in Iowa.

"Kurt Simon is the kind of leader who builds locally led partnerships so that USDA conservation programs can target the places where there is both great need and great support," Vilsack said.

Simon has 31 years experience in conservation with USDA, most recently serving as Tennessee NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations (ASTC-FO) in Knoxville. He holds degrees in wildlife management from Hocking College and agronomy from Ohio State University.

Simon began his career as a Conservation District Technician in Ohio, served in field offices in West Virginia and Tennessee and at NRCS Headquarters in DC. He has served as liaison to the National Wild Turkey Federation, The Nature Conservancy, and graduated from the NRCS Emerging Leadership



Newly announced State Conservationist Kurt Simon speaks to a group of conservation partners, Iowa NRCS leadership team members, and local media at event at the Des Moines Botanical Gardens, Oct. 15, 2015. (L-R) Iowa Ag Secretary Bill Northey, US Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack, Simon, Acting Iowa State Conservationist Rick Ellsmore, and Iowa DNR Deputy Director Bruce Trautman.

Development Program through George Washington University in 2012.

Simon started leading Iowa NRCS Oct. 19.

IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Current Developments is a product of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Des Moines, Iowa, published bimonthly by the Iowa NRCS Public Affairs Staff in cooperation with NRCS and partner agency employees from across the state.

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS STORIES AND PHOTOS

Please submit your Current Developments story ideas and photos to State Public Affairs Specialist Laura Crowell at laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov. Past issues can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/ia/people/employees/?cid=nrcs142p2_008273



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JAY MAR: FORMER STC RECEIVES STATE AWARD FROM CDI

Former Iowa NRCS State Conservationist Jay Mar received the Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) Honorary Member & Division of Soil Conservation Award on September 1, 2015 at the 69th Annual Iowa Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners Conference at Prairie Meadows Conference Center in Altoona.

After nearly three years as the state conservationist, Mar retired in July with 33 years of dedicated federal service. During his tenure, he was instrumental in building Iowa NRCS as an agency leader in soil health and conservation planning. He kept a busy schedule, traveling often to all four corners of the state to support local conservation activities.

CDI President Jane Weber said of Mar, "Jay is a passionate conservationist and we are grateful he and his wife are staying in Iowa! His leadership, commitment and dedication as state conservationist will have a lasting and significant impact on the people and natural resources of Iowa."



L-R: Sherman Lundy, State Soil Conservation Committee Chair; Jay Mar, award recipient and Jane Weber, Conservation Districts of Iowa President at the Iowa Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners Conference in Altoona.



FIRST S&W CONSERVATION DISTRICT: MARION SWCD CELEBRATES 75TH ANNIVERSARY

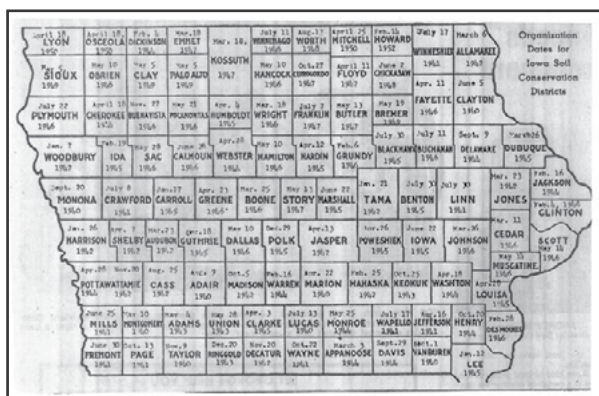
The first Iowa Soil and Water Conservation District to turn 75 is Marion County. Originally called "Soil Conservation Districts," the Marion district was officially formed on April 22, 1940. By 1950, all 100 conservation districts were formed.

USDA's Soil Conservation Service (SCS) piloted the English Creek Watershed in Marion County for a conservation demonstration watershed beginning in 1934. Work included contour layout, terraces, replacing red clover with alfalfa in rotations, and nutrient management recommendations. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp near Knoxville helped farmers with processing and spreading of Ag-Lime.

The district hosted a field day in 1946 that attracted Hugh Hammond Bennett, the SCS Chief, as a speaker.

Top: The Marion SWCD celebrated its 75th Anniversary with an event on Sept. 10. (L-R) District Conservationist Jeff Matthias, Acting Iowa NRCS State Conservationist Rick Ellmore, CDI Executive Director Clare Lindahl, Iowa Agriculture Secretary Bill Northey, IDALS Fields Services Bureau Chief Vince Sitzmann, and IDALS Field Services Representative Matt McDonald.

Bottom: A map showing the organization dates for Iowa's original Soil Conservation Districts.



BACK IN THE DAY

1958

GULLY AND SOIL EROSION CONTROL

Before



This is the "before" picture on the Elvin Rector farm, of a ditch where a structure is to be installed. The farm is three miles southwest of Panora, in Cass Township.

After



This is the same ditch after the structure was completed. Drainage area is 21 acres; pond size will be approximately .6 of an acre when full.

The Iowa Soil and Water publication featured Guthrie County dam structures in its June 1958 issue. Above is a Before and After picture on the Elvin Rector farm, located three miles southwest of Panora.



JUNE
1958

Iowa Soil & Water Features
GUTHRIE SOIL DISTRICT

Thank you to Soil Conservationist Jason Hart for submitting these photos.

If you have a "Back in the Day" picture you would like to contribute, please mail it to Jason Johnson or Laura Crowell in the State Office, or scan and e-mail a high resolution version to laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Larry Beeler



Larry Beeler

Title: Assistant State Conservationist, Programs

College Education:

» 4-Year Degree in Agronomy,
Iowa State University, 1980

Younger Years: Larry was raised on a combination diverse live-stock/grain farm in southern Madison County. He continues to enjoy helping his mom and brother on this Heritage Farm.

Conservation Career: Larry's first experience with SCS/NRCS was as a one-day volunteer with Dale Frank, a soil conservation technician in the Winterset field office. He helped survey a terrace job.

- He started his USDA career in the Greenfield field office in

1977 as a student trainee. He also spent time in Creston and Iowa City as a student trainee.

- Following college graduation, Larry started as a full-time soil conservationist in Denison.
- He then spent about 5 years in Manchester as the district conservationist. Larry says that's where he met his wife, Lynn.
- He later served as an Area Resource Conservationist in Shenandoah (3 years), Council Bluffs (1 year) and Indianola (6 years).
- In 1996, Larry moved to the Farm Bill Team in Des Moines, serving as EQIP Coordinator.
- Since 2005, he has been the Assistant State Conservationist for Programs.

What He Likes About His Job:

In his current position, he says he enjoys the diversity of the work and programs that he stays familiar with. Through the years, he has enjoyed working with producers to treat their resource issues.

Hobbies/Interests:

In his free time, Larry enjoys working on the family farm. Recently, he has developed an interest in draft horse driving.

Family Life:

His wife, Lynn, works as a nurse at Mercy Clinics. His daughter, Hannah, lives in Tuscaloosa, Ala., and his son, Grant, is a senior at Iowa State University.



Iowa Agribusiness Report, WHO-TV, Oct. 16, 2015

The [Iowa Agribusiness Report](#) from Oct. 16, 2015, on WHO-TV 13 in Des Moines highlighted the extension for planting winter hardy cover crops, the announcement of \$3 million for wetland easements in Iowa through WREP, and the naming of Kurt Simon as Iowa NRCS State Conservationist.



FLU SHOTS FOR FEDS

Federal Employee Health Benefit (FEHB) health plans cover flu shots at not cost to their members. Many plans offer flu shots for children and adults at convenient locations, like retail pharmacies.

Visit flushot.healthmap.org/ to find a convenient location.

Review your FEHB Plan Brochure at <https://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/healthcare/plan-information/>.



HR
CORNER

SAVE THE DATE: 2016 IWINR CONFERENCE

Mark your calendars for the 2016 Iowa Women in Natural Resources (IWINR) Conference, Jan. 28-29, at Grand River Center in Dubuque, IA.

As IWINR continues its campaign to make a difference, "Together We Make a Difference" is the mission for the 2016 year. The conference will be

filled with many career building skills such as learning to enhance your resume and cover letter to help land that initial interview, followed by how to best prepare once you've got an interview.

For more information, visit www.iwinr.com.

By Alan Lauver, Agricultural Economist



Alan Lauver

Interest in cover crops is growing across Iowa and the country because of the potential benefits they offer farmers. Before a producer adds cover crops, it is important to consider the impacts cover crops may have on their operation.

NRCS has a new tool to assess the

economics and focus on new costs and benefits. That knowledge is key to the decision-making process. It can improve farmers' ability to commit to using cover crops as a long-term and successful conservation solution on their farm. The [Cover Crop Economics Tool](#) is a user-friendly economic assessment tool for both short-term and long-term expected costs and benefits of incorporating cover crops into a crop rotation.

Typical cover crop costs (seed, application, termination) are captured by the tool. The tool can also account for yield loss or other costs. Potential benefits that can be quantified have been incorporated into this tool. Potential short-term benefits such as direct nutrient credits, input reductions (herbicide/insecticide/fungicide), yield increases, reduced erosion, grazing, as well as long-term benefits such as overall soil fertility, improved water storage and infiltration can be captured with user-supplied values.

This tool can also be helpful for you to work with an experienced cover crop user to develop a case study on their experience with cover crops for your county. Contact me (alan.lauver@ia.usda.gov) if you want assistance using the tool yourself or with a producer. I would also be glad to help with developing case studies.

The tool is available for download from the Iowa NRCS website at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/PA_NRCSConsumption/download?cid=nrcseprd385824&ext=xls.

Additional resources

Cover crops economics tool demonstrations:

- [20-Minute Demo](#)
- [1-Hour Demo](#)

Cover Crops Tool: An Economic Decision Support Tool:

- [Fact Sheet](#)



EARTH TEAM: TASKS VOLUNTEERS CAN PERFORM, Q&A

The Earth Team is NRCS' volunteer workforce that is making a difference in every county in the nation. NRCS works with private landowners to improve soil quality, conserve water, improve air quality and enhance wildlife habitat. Earth Team volunteers work side-by-side with conservation professionals and are an integral part of the conservation partnership.

Earth Team offers many opportunities for people who are interested in volunteering to improve the nation's natural resources. People who are 14-years-old and older can volunteer. Volunteers can work part-time or full-time, work outdoors or inside a local NRCS office, individually or as a group.

Here are 4 questions that will help you in determining if you have an Earth Team volunteer:

- Is the individual at least 14 years old, and do they have parental or legal guardian permission if under 18?
- If they are an NRCS employee, district employee, or commissioner, is the job outside the scope of the paid or elected position?
- Is the job they are performing one that an NRCS employee can or would perform?
- Is your state conservationist willing to extend worker's compensation and tort coverage to the volunteer?

If you can answer YES to all four questions, then you have an Earth Team volunteer!

Earth Team Q&A

Q1. A conservation district employee volunteers to assist with a mission related outdoor classroom volunteer event on their day off. Can I count these hours?

A1. Yes. You can count these hours as long as you can verify that the outdoor classroom is NRCS mission-related and that the volunteer duties of the conservation district employee is not part of their paid position.

Q2. The conservation district is planning a tree sale. Can my Earth Team volunteers assist them?

A2. Yes, as long as they do not handle any money, seek out any donations or solicit the sale.

Q3. I have a local work group who meets to discuss local conservation needs. They provide recommendations to the district conservationist. Can I count these hours?

A3. Yes. This is an NRCS-related activity and NRCS requested individuals from the community to volunteer their input.

Q4. Is it legitimate to claim hours for a hosted volunteer? A hosted volunteer is defined as any volunteer who receives pay from a source other than NRCS. Examples of this type of service could include welfare-to-work type programs and job training programs.

A4. Yes. We can count seniors that are assisting us with our NRCS mission and are paid by grant funds through the Department of Labor. Of course, we cannot count employees who are paid by NRCS through an agreement for funding.

Q5. An NRCS employee is laying out a practice and the farmer assists the employee with the stakeout. Can the farmer's time be counted as volunteer time?

A5. Yes, this is considered volunteer time. The planning time with the farmer is not volunteer time. If the planning and layout/checkout time overlap, the NRCS employee estimates the planning time and deducts that from the total time spent with the farmer. The difference (time used to layout or checkout the project) is recorded as volunteer hours. His/her time is added under the "Friends of Conservation" group as volunteer hours that will be recorded for the month.

If you have further questions, contact National Volunteer Liaison Bonney Allely at 888-526-3227, x105, or your local Earth Team representative.

LA PORTE CITY TOUR: VILSACK TOURS WATER QUALITY PRACTICES



US Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack visited Nick Meier's family farm in Black Hawk County on Friday, Oct. 16, to view innovative water quality conservation practices.

Meier's farm near La Porte City includes a denitrifying bioreactor, saturated buffer, and cover crops. Meier has worked alongside Iowa NRCS District Conservationist Shaffer Ridgeway for several years.

The tour provided an opportunity for Ridgeway to meet Secretary Vilsack and talk about how these newer, innovative practices work to treat nitrates.

Following the tour, Meier, Vilsack, Iowa Ag Secretary Bill Northey, and Cedar Rapids Mayor Ron Corbett talked to an audience of more than 100 about the potential for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to help get more practices on the land.

Above: Secretary Vilsack shakes hands with Iowa NRCS District Conservationist Shaffer Ridgeway during a tour of water quality practices near La Porte City on Oct. 16.

Below: Iowa NRCS Soil Conservationist Julie Falcon meets Secretary Vilsack, and asks him to sign a conservation plan folder.



GEOLOGIC SITE INVESTIGATIONS: STAFF TRAINS, TOURS SITE

Twenty-one staff members from the Anamosa, Epworth, Manchester, Marion, and Maquoketa field offices took part in a field training session hosted by the Anamosa Field Office Oct. 15.

State Geologist Kathy Woida and Area 3 Engineer George Schaefer provided guidance on Iowa NRCS engineering policy and procedures for geologic site investigations.

After lunch, the group enjoyed a tour of the Stone City Quarry near Anamosa on the banks of the Wapsipinicon River. Now owned and operated by the Weber Stone Company, the quarry began producing building stone in the 1840's, at one time employing more than a thousand workers. The company currently sells an impressive range of products,

including cut blocks, flagstone, stone veneer, patio squares, and landscaping stone.

The stone comes from the 14-ft. thick Anamosa Limestone layer and is desirable for its uniform bedding and texture. The building stone has been used widely in Iowa as well as around the U.S. Examples include Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, the Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, the Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, and a Michael Jordan home in California.

For more information about the history of the quarry and the company town of Stone City, go to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone_City,_Iowa.



1 The group stands in front of a large rock saws.

2 Looking out over the "floor" of Anamosa Limestone, as a movable saw makes a 10-ft-deep cut in the rock.

3 Milled stone veneer panels.

PRECISION AG PARTNERSHIP: INTEGRATING BUSINESS, AGRONOMIC, CONSERVATION PLANNING SERVICES IN SW IOWA

Pheasants Forever, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), AgSolver and Heartland Co-op, have entered into a groundbreaking partnership to integrate business, agronomic, and conservation planning services for farmers in southwest Iowa. The Precision Agriculture Business Planning Partnership is aimed at providing increased farm income to area producers by offering conservation practices on less profitable crop acres.

"It is critical for us as farmers to protect working capital and focus resources in order to maximize our return-on-investment (ROI). This starts by understanding real business performance within our fields," stated David Muth, senior vice president for AgSolver. "Precision business planning at a sub-field scale will identify acres where business performance dictates a transition to lower-cost revenue opportunities. Essentially, this partnership will achieve conservation outcomes while helping farmers make more income – a win-win for producers and wildlife."

The foundation of this new partnership is built on the technology of AgSolver's Profit Zone Manager™ platform which focuses on ROI at a sub-field scale. This technology comes at a critical time when USDA is predicting a net farm income decline of 36 percent for 2015 – the largest year-to-year drop since 1983. With a variety of conservation programs currently available in Iowa and yielding high rental rates, ROI technology can define areas where conservation programs are more profitable for producers than row crops, and can help to diversify farm income over the long-term.

Recently hired by Pheasants Forever as a Precision Agriculture Business Planning Specialist, Jeremy Biggs will work closely with Heartland Co-op agronomists and farmers to perform the economic analyses and help pinpoint under-performing acres in southwest Iowa, particularly within the East and West Nishnabotna watersheds. "I'm excited to be working with a great group of partner organizations and look forward to using the latest and greatest agriculture technology to identify areas of need for producers," said Biggs. "This is a real opportunity to create more



sustainable and profitable land uses in our state." Biggs will be based in the Neola office of Heartland Co-op where he recently completed an internship with Heartland. He graduated from Northwest Missouri State University with a degree in Agriculture Science and Business, and started his new position on September 21.

"Heartland Co-op is extremely pleased to be involved with Pheasants Forever, Ag Solver, and NRCS in this partnership to strengthen farmer participation in adopting new conservation projects and supporting Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy," expressed Dave Coppess, executive vice president for Heartland Co-op. "Our Certified Crop Advisors and Technical Service Providers are active catalysts for defining unprofitable zones within individual fields that should be enrolled in permanent wildlife habitat. Working together, we will expedite the process in a manner which is profitable for farmers and sustainable for Iowa's natural resources."

Once the Profit Zone Manager analysis is completed, a producer will be made aware of other conservation programs that may offer enhanced ROI than the current crop rotation, while also providing increased soil health, water quality, and wildlife habitat benefits."

This project is a step toward linking conservation to sound agronomic and farm business planning. When farmers can identify parts of fields which chronically lose money, those problem spots can become opportunities for conservation and the farmer's financial bottom line," said Rick Ellsmore, acting state conservationist for USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service in Iowa.

IN MEMORY OF MARV: MARION COUNTY GROUPS HONOR LATE DC

The Marion County Soil and Water Conservation District and County Conservation Board dedicated a bench along the Volkweg Trail by Red Rock Lake in early October to honor Marvin Mensching, the Iowa NRCS District Conservationist, who passed away in June 2006 due to ALS, or Lou Gehrig's Disease.

Mensching worked for NRCS for 25 years, the last 18 as DC in Knoxville.

Marion County Soil and Water Commissioner Doug DeHaan says Mensching was an avid outdoorsman, and the view patrons will see from the bench will represent his life well.

"Marv Mensching was a great conservationist, and he loved to fish and hunt," DeHann told KNIA/KRLS Radio News. "We kind of thought that would be a neat way to tie that in with some of his thoughts and some of his passions."

DeHann told KNIA/KRLS the bench was paid for by memorial funds. He encourages trail goers to visit the site at the West Cordova Trailhead across from the Roberts Creek West Boat Ramp.

Mensching began his NRCS career in 1981 as a temporary soil conservationist in Shenandoah.

In 2010, a group of state and local conservation partners dedicated a wetland on the campus of 3M Corporation in Knoxville. DeHaan says the local conservation district wanted to place a memorial somewhere more visible to the public.

He said they started the bench fund with leftovers from the 3M wetlands. Additional fundraising was recently completed and a cement pad was constructed on the trail and the bench was placed before Labor Day.

DeHaan told The Knoxville Journal-Express, "(Marv) made a pretty big impression on everybody, with his kindness and the way he would always help everybody. He was very involved in soil conservation, but he also like to fish and loved wildlife."

Photos by Jeff Matthias, NRCS District Conservationist.



Changes In IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Diaz Pacheco, Urayoan	Soil Conservationist	Career Conditional Appt.	8/23/15	Ida Grove
Schenck, Lara	Soil Conservationist	Career Conditional Appt.	8/23/15	Corning
Smith, Gareth	Soil Conservation Technician	Career Conditional Appt.	8/23/15	Corydon
Taylor, Robert	Soil Conservation Technician	Retirement	8/31/15	Greenfield
Beck, Katherine	Soil Conservation Technician	Career Conditional Appt.	9/6/15	Atlantic
Burgos Lozada, Jose	Soil Conservation Technician	Career Conditional Appt.	9/6/15	Fort Dodge
Jeter, Celinda	Program Assistant	Career Conditional Appt.	9/6/15	Williamsburg
Straskowski, James	Soil Conservation Technician	Conv. to Career Appt.	9/6/15	Hampton
Yaddof, Dexter	Soil Conservationist	Conv. to Career Conditional Appt.	9/6/15	Osceola
Dojutrek, Chris	Soil Conservation Technician	Career Conditional Appt.	9/20/15	Creston
Reinders, Samuel	Soil Conservation Technician	Career Conditional Appt.	9/20/15	Orange City
Brosnan, Timothy	Soil Conservationist	Conv. to Career Conditional Appt.	9/20/15	Sergeant Bluff
Beltz, Abby	District Conservationist	Promotion	9/20/15	Independence
Houck, Tara	Office Assistant	Transferred to USFWS-Colorado	10/3/15	Area 4 Programs
Mesmer, Ryan	Biologist	Transferred to USGS-California	10/3/15	Area 4 Agronomic
Hain, Clint	Soil Conservation Technician	Career Conditional Appt.	10/4/15	Spirit Lake
Schneider, Kathy	Natural Resource Specialist	Transfer to Area Easement Spec.	10/4/15	Ida Grove
Griem, Jennifer	Program Assistant	Conv. to Career Appt.	10/4/15	Tipton
Wickman, Stacy	Natural Resource Specialist	Reassignment	10/18/15	Des Moines
Adam, Eric	Soil Conservationist	Career Conditional Appt.	10/18/15	Williamsburg

Changes In IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Aden, Jacobine	Soil Conservationist	Career Conditional Appt.	10/18/15	DeWitt
Haun, Ava	Soil Conservationist	Conv. to Career Conditional Appt.	10/18/15	Marshalltown
Brincks, Devin	Soil Conservation Technician	Promotion	10/18/15	West Union
Cibula, Christina	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	10/18/15	Area 3 Agronomic
Simon, Kurt	State Conservationist	Promotion	10/18/15	Des Moines
Jensen, George	Soil Conservation Technician	Reassignment	10/18/15	Greenfield
Lange, Alan	Resource Conservationist	Reassignment	10/18/15	Des Moines

Changes In IDALS-DSC PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Dittman, Brandon	Environmental Specialist Senior	Transfer from Field Services Bureau to Water Resources Bureau	9/25/15	Des Moines
Suckow, Jackie	Communications & Outreach Coordinator	Resigned	9/24/15	Des Moines